



In Touch South India

Headlines from the U.S. Consulate General Chennai

September - October, 2005

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PEOPLE TO PEOPLE

Who did we meet these past two months? Well, we may not have met all the quarter billion people in our consular district, but we made a heroic effort to meet as generous a cross section of the population as possible. We were honored to meet governors, chief ministers, cricket and film stars and police commissioners. But we were equally honored, and much more humbled by, a group of HIV-positive children that had been thrown out of their village in Andhra Pradesh and rescued by an NGO in Vijayawada. And we'll never forget the blind children we met in Bangalore, who were learning traditional dance and doing their own work in a paper processing plant. Or the huge mass of blind children, in Chennai, surging forward to touch a real seeing eye dog for the first time. Or the laughter as a burkah-clad woman in Hyderabad's old market properly tied another burkah onto a visiting female U.S. speaker. Or the orphans who we hosted for the movie "Peter Pan" on International Youth Day. Or the Muslim schoolchildren who came to the AIRC and got their first ever taste of the internet—and promptly googled "Mosques in America" (see photograph). And that's not to demean in any way the continued pleasure we experience each time we meet educators who are passionate about their students. Or volunteers and/or NGO workers who are making a positive difference in the lives of others. Or business men and women achieving both corporate and civic excellence. Or visa applicants whose eyes light up at the prospect of visiting the United States.

The point is: We only achieve mutual understanding through people-to-people contact. We're holding our end of the bargain—and it's the best part of our job! —**Christopher Wurst, Editor In touch.**

On August 26, 2005, David T. Hopper assumed the position of Consul General at Consulate Chennai. Before coming to Chennai, Mr. Hopper served as Principal Officer at the U.S. Consulate General in Melbourne, Australia, from 2002 until earlier this year. Earlier, Mr. Hopper was Consul General and Minister Counselor for Consular Affairs in Beijing from 1999-2002. He is a member of the Senior Foreign Service at the rank of Minister-Counselor.



Mr. Hopper joined the Foreign Service in 1975 and was assigned to Stuttgart, Germany as consular officer. Subsequently, he served as consular officer at Bombay (Mumbai), India, and then as chief of the consular section at Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. After an assignment in the Department of State's Executive Secretariat, Mr. Hopper served in Krakow, Poland as consular chief. He later served at Stockholm, Sweden, also as consular chief, and after a year-long fellowship at Princeton University's Woodrow Wilson School, in the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs as office director. In 1992, Mr. Hopper returned to Poland as Consul General in Warsaw. He was Managing Director of the Department of State's Visa Office from 1995-1997. He speaks German, Polish, Swedish, and Chinese.

He is married to Susan Woolley Hopper, a retired Foreign Service Staff Officer. They have a 20-year-old daughter.



Upcoming Films:

September 2:
Kiss Me Kate (1953)



September 16:
West Side Story (1961)



September 30:
Kismet (1955)

October 14:
42nd Street (1933)

October 28:
The Music Man (1962)

All Films at 6:30p.m.
at Film Chamber Theater

Co-sponsored by
The Madras Film Society

CONSULAR CORNER

Most people realize the value information technology workers from South India add to the U.S. economy. In the past few years, however, South India has increasingly filled another critical shortage area in America's labor supply.

The U.S. has a shortage of well-qualified, English-speaking nurses to serve in hospitals, nursing homes, and other healthcare institutions. Fortunately, Kerala boasts one of the



best applicant pools of well-educated, well-qualified nurses in the world. Health care employers regularly recruit nurses in Kerala. These institutions acknowledge Kerala's well-established reputation for

supplying skilled nurses with customer-focused orientation and the work ethic necessary for success in the U.S. healthcare market.

Last year, Consulate Chennai issued over 1,500 immigrant visas to nurses and their families, and this year we are on track to issue even more. These nurses not only bring their professional skills to the U.S., but also bring their spouses, children, and the wonderful culture of South India to the cities and towns where they work and live. We look forward to welcoming these nurses with open arms for their visa interviews, and helping them on the path to U.S. citizenship.

Positive Images

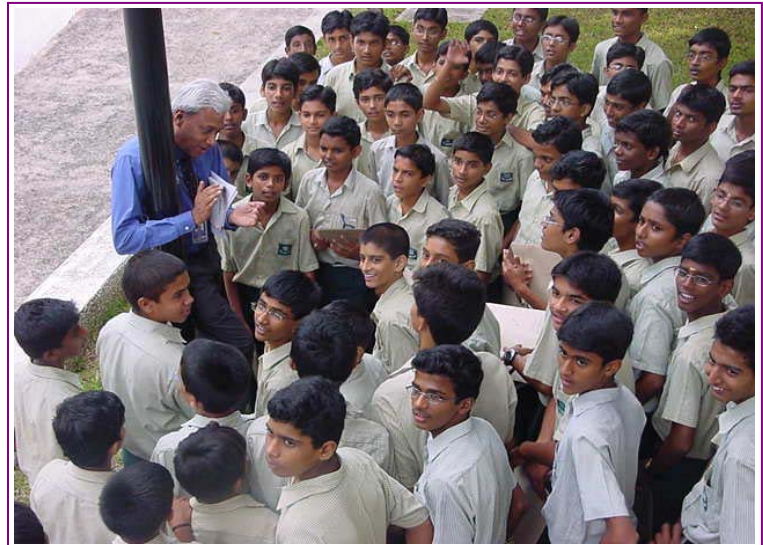


◀ *Mr. Bob Blake
Deputy Chief of
Mission at the
U.S. Embassy in
New Delhi,
addresses the
CII Conference
to Accelerate the
Awareness of
HIV/AIDS, in
Chennai (July).*

▶ *DPAO
Christopher
Wurst with
renowned Telugu
film star
Venkatesh, at
the inauguration
of the DPAO's
photo exhibition
That Other
Reality in
Hyderabad
(August).*



AIRC ATTRACTS OVER 400 STUDENTS IN JULY-AUGUST



Above: The PAO briefs boys from Kalamandir about AIRC resources.

Librarians at Chennai's AIRC took on the role of teachers, as almost 500 students visited in the past two months. PAO Ravi Candadai and DPAO Christopher Wurst were the key speakers, engaging the children in lively sessions focusing on U.S. history, culture, geography and policy. The children, who were often given U.S. maps and other resource materials, were enthusiastic, and eager to learn more about the U.S. The interaction between the staff and the students was very warm and friendly, inducing the students' confidence to ask dozens of questions. They explored the library, poring over encyclopedias, handbooks, atlases, CD-ROMS, the internet and videos. "This is one of the best places I've ever visited," said one student (who didn't want to leave). Many students said that they would share their experience and return with their friends. Recently, consular officer Lisa Ficek gave one group a pictorial tour of key places in the U.S., prompting one student to comment, "This is not at all like any other educational trip I've been on—this was fun!"

Students ranged in ages between 9 and 16, and came from: the Government Girls HS, Kalamandir HS, Vidyodaya HS Academy, and Anjuman-e-Himayeth-e-Islam.

Below: Students from Anjuman visit the DPAO's photography exhibition at Lakshana Gallery, in Chennai. Most loved their first ever experience at an art gallery.



People and Places



On July 27-28, 11 members of the Consulate community paid a visit to the Sri Venkateswara Temple in the Hindu holy city of Tirumala, Andhra Pradesh. After a late-night hike over the 9 km trail traversing the 7 sacred hills that lead to the temple, the group members were privileged to receive a special darshan and tour of the temple from temple officials. Several members of the group went a step further and underwent a traditional tonsure in honor of their journey, and donned dhotis and other appropriate garb for their appearance before the idol of Sri Venkateswara.

The members of the group were impressed by the devotion of the pilgrims and the scale of the Tirumala temple, and were astounded to learn that the town receives more pilgrims in a year than Mecca, Rome, or Jerusalem. Given the volume of traffic, the temple appeared orderly and efficient, allowing tens of thousands of devotees a moment or two before the idol every day. The Consulate group members were unanimous in finding the trip an exhilarating and moving experience, despite the arduous overnight journey to get to the temple.

—Christopher Alison, Vice Consul for Consular Affairs

INROADS, INSIGHTS FOR THE BLIND

Not only did Joyce Kane, a blind woman from Connecticut, travel halfway across the world to come to Chennai, with her guide dog Corey as her only companion, but the trip represented her first journey outside the U.S. Her trip here, to talk about disability rights in America and self-care and



Joyce Kane meets the press, with doctors from MV Diabetes

empowerment for the visually impaired, highlighted Ms. Kane's courage and commitment to others. "The main thing I lost seven years ago was not my sight," she said, "but my independence." In the seven years since she went blind (during open heart surgery) Kane has become a champion for both diabetics and the visually impaired. Speaking to standing-room-only audiences in Chennai and Bangalore, she was compared by audience members to Helen Keller and Lance Armstrong, two paragons of overcoming adversity.

Ms. Kane's trip to south India was full of inspiring moments: Crowds of blind children surging forward to touch (and sometimes test) a seeing eye dog for the first time; blind traditional dancers in Karnataka demonstrating their "touch method" to teach these age old forms to the visually impaired; and meeting dozens—hundreds—of people who are working on behalf of the disabled in India. Finally, as an awareness campaign, this one started at square one. Indian airlines had to be convinced to allow a guide dog to board, hotels needed to give special permission, restaurants had to alter policies, and shopping centers had to make executive decisions. To be fair, these Indian decision makers were open minded and enthusiastic. And, in the end, Joyce and Corey won over everyone they met.

What we're Reading

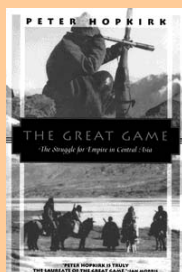
Beth Rollins,

Consular Associate:

The Great Game:

The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia by Peter Hopkirk (1990)

"A brilliantly written, entertaining historical narrative of the struggles between Victorian England and Tsarist Russia as they fought over territory and influence throughout Central Asia. Highly recommended."



RL Gowri,

Reference Librarian:

The Instant Manager:

More Than 100 Quick Tips & Techniques for Great Results by Cy Charney (2004)

"A very nice book meant for junior and mid-level professionals. Practical tips on all aspects of management are provided in 'easy read' two-page capsules. Topics include 'Influencing People,' 'Reading Body Language,' and 'Empowering.'"

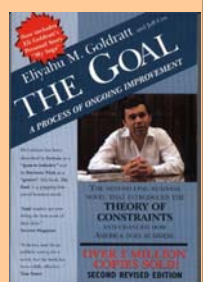


Miguel Ordonez,

Acting Consular Chief:

The Goal by Eliyahu Goldblatt (1984)

"About getting an overworked and chaotic workplace to function more smoothly by focusing on logjams and physical limitations."



Q & A with Dr. SANJAN JOHN

Note: Dr. John is Post Medical Officer at the American Consulate General Chennai.

CW: You are an institution at Consulate Chennai. Can you share a bit about your background?

SJ: I have been working here since 1986. My roots are in Kerala, but my family has lived in Chennai for over three generations. All my education has been here and in Karnataka.

CW: What services do you provide to the people in the Consulate?

SJ: I am the primary care provider or the G.P. for the office. We have a full-time unit now, with Nurse Tammy Latimer here all day. We help officers and their families to get specialist care when needed.

CW: Now to get to the heart of the matter. What, in your opinion, are the greatest health risks living in a place like Chennai?

SJ: People definitely need to be concerned about the well-known mosquito transmitted diseases, such as malaria and dengue fever. Both are dangerous, and present here. Parasitic ailments, such as gastroenteritis, or water-borne sicknesses, such as leptospirosis [a bacterial disease usually caused by exposure to contaminated water] are serious problems.

CW: Speaking of mosquitoes, can you talk a bit about the illnesses they carry, and how to best avoid them?

SJ: There are three main culprits. Female Anopheles mosquitoes transmit malaria. These mosquitoes are out at night. Recently there have been cases of malaria among expats here in Chennai, though none directly affecting Consulate families. Aedes Egypti mosquitoes transmit Dengue Fever, another serious affliction. These mosquitoes are usually out daylight hours. Culex mosquitoes transmit Japanese Encephalitis, and are most common at dusk, night and dawn. The bottom line is that you must keep yourself protected at all times. Wear long sleeve clothing, use repellent during the day if you are out in the open, and use nets with DEET at night.

CW: In the interest of balance, though, do you think people here worry too much about health risks?

SJ: No. I prefer people worrying too much.

CW: Okay then. What do you think people should worry more about?

SJ: Well, I worry about people who are too laid back. I wish people would call a doctor when they have symptoms that persist more than 48 hours. Especially with some of the above ailments, catching it early can make a huge difference.

CW: What's the strangest thing you've seen or had requested of you in your time here?

SJ: I had an officer once who didn't believe in allopathy, and insisted only on indigenous medicines. He refused all injections—but, fortunately, left post healthy. The toughest call

was in the mid-90's; one Sunday night I got a call from a U.S. Navy ship captain, 200 miles from Chennai, who had an 18 year old cadet with acute appendicitis. The ACS and Health units, with the help of an Indian Naval helicopter, had the cadet in a city hospital in 4 hours, where they took out a foot-long appendix that was ready to burst.

CW: Wow. That must have been a stressful four hours. Working at the Consulate, in general, is often a high-

stress, fast-paced experience. What can people do to minimize on-the-job stress?

SJ: The best stress reliever is exercise. We should all thank consular officer Bernt Johnson who worked two years to have a gym in place here. Frequent breaks away from Chennai, such as long weekends, especially help to cope with stress.

CW: Thanks very much for your time, and your dedication. In closing, do you expect any major medical breakthroughs in the imminent future?

SJ: Until we find a cure for the common cold all breakthrough is secondary!

CW: Thank you again.

